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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6563
INFO RUCNASE/ASEAN MEMBER COLLECTIVE
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RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 0538
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 4070
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7628
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 5185
RHHMUNA/CDR USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA 3319
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK 0974
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
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SUBJECT: EMBASSY CONVENES EAC AND TOWN HALL MEETINGS

REF: RANGOON 911 AND PREVIOUS

11. (SBU) Summary. The Embassy on September 25 held an EAC meeting to discuss security given the current political situation. The EAC agreed that the Embassy's security posture was sufficient given the current political situation.

The EAC recommended town hall meetings to discuss recent developments with local employees and American citizens. Accordingly, we hosted on September 26 two town hall meetings; more than 150 American citizens attended. Embassy officials clarified the facts of the current political situation, explained basic security measures, and addressed questions and concerns. RSO advised American citizens to avoid demonstrations and large crowds, and instead seek shelter away from the protests. Charge emphasized that we will continue to pass information to American citizens in a timely fashion and urged people to be aware of their own personal security. End Summary.

EAC Meeting Convened

12. (SBU) On September 25, the Emergency Action Committee (EAC) for American Embassy Rangoon met to discuss the security situation in Burma in light of ongoing protests that have become more political in tone (Reftel). The EAC agreed that the Embassy's current precautions and security posture were sufficient but made the following recommendations:

- American Staff should increase radio checks on the Embassy E&E network;
- All employees should have sufficient food and water available in their residences in the event that sheltering in place became necessary;
- and all employees should stay alert to the daily changes in the movements of anti-government protests, avoid areas of mass demonstrations, and report any security incidents and problems.

Discussing the Current Situation

13. (SBU) Per the EAC's recommendation, Embassy Rangoon

hosted on September 26 two Town Hall meetings for local staff and American citizens to discuss the current political situation. More than 150 American citizens attended. The Charge opened the meeting by explaining that Embassy officials wanted to provide factual information to Amcits hearing many rumors about the current political situation. She emphasized that we would continue to pass information to Americans in a timely fashion, while requesting patience as we tried to restore full communications now that we had moved into our new Embassy. Our officers continue to work with both Washington and local authorities to resolve the communication issues as quickly as possible.

¶4. (SBU) Poloff then addressed the group, explaining the current situation. Noting that while the demonstrations, which began on September 19, have grown in size, he emphasized that news reports of 100,000 protestors were greatly exaggerated. Embassy officials observed most of the demonstrations, he explained, and saw at most 10,000 demonstrators at the peak of the protests. Several thousand people often observe these protests daily. Since September 19, the demonstrations have become increasingly political, with more civilians and political activists, holding political banners and chanting political slogans, joining the protests daily. Poloff also reported that we had not observed any significant uniformed presence at the demonstrations nor arrests or violence associated with the recent demonstrations led by monks. However, he added that he saw armed military troops gathering downtown the evening of September 25.

¶5. (SBU) Although the demonstrations have not been violent, RSO informed American citizens that they should be aware of

RANGOON 00000914 002 OF 002

their personal security and recommended that they avoid the protests. There is little danger from the actual protestors, he explained, but a safety threat exists as the police have no crowd control capability. If people see crowds, they should seek shelter in a safe place. RSO also explained that the Embassy had no additional information on the curfew or the restrictions on gatherings of more than five people, but were requesting clarification and would pass along information received. The restriction on groups was not new, Charge noted, but has tended to be selectively enforced. He emphasized that people should use common sense, avoid dangerous situations, and report any security incidents to the Embassy.

Answering Amcits' Concerns

¶6. (SBU) Several Amcits inquired about the Embassy's communications system, noting that they have been unable to get through. We passed them a different embassy phone number -- 95-1-650-006 -- which should rollover calls to the next available line. We acknowledged the phones had frequently been busy and pledged to do our utmost to resolve the problems quickly. Conoff noted that the Department would likely release a new public announcement shortly. We will post the information online and disseminate it through the warden system. Conoff also encouraged all Americans to register with the Embassy; afterwards more than 20 did.

¶7. (SBU) One American, noting that some schools are closed for security reasons, asked for the Embassy's recommendations regarding school closures. Charge explained that the RSO has been providing updated security information to the schools so that the administrations and parents can make informed decisions about classes. We subsequently learned that one school decided to close until mid-October, moving up a scheduled break.

¶8. (SBU) Several participants asked about possible evacuation plans. The Charge replied that the current situation did not warrant an evacuation; and the Embassy

would continue to monitor and assess the situation to keep Amcits informed. If the security situation deteriorates and foreigners become targets, the Embassy will advise Amcits about departing the country. Until then, individuals should remain vigilant about their own individual security. One asked whether they could take refuge at the Embassy. Charge explained that we were not equipped to house large numbers of people, and said people should be safe in their own homes. We advised them to stock up on water and food. RSO reiterated that people should avoid crowds and seek shelter in a safe location. An American citizen spoke up at the conclusion, stating that people should stay close to home for the next week and see how the demonstrations play out.

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